

EYES AND NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON STORY
A Practice Led Exploration
of the Use of Eyes and Eye Lines in
Fiction Film

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Abstract

Eyes and eye lines are one of the key ways in which the perspective on a story is established in figurative narrative fiction cinema. As such, the eyes and the use of eyes by a performer needs as much creative and technical attention as shot composition, sound, production design and editing. Rather than thinking of the eyes of a performer as a subservient aspect of a projected performance, often driven by the dominance of dialogue-action delivery, this paper seeks to examine how, in fictional cinematic expression, eyes can be deployed to enhance an introspective and transcendent narrative perspective on a story.

This exploration takes place through practice. In particular, during the creation of my latest feature film, *The Raven On The Jetty* (Erik Knudsen, UK 2014), in which I sought to explore how to enhance the relationship between eyes, eye lines and narrative perspective on story.

In reflecting on these issues, I shall look at what is meant by narrative perspective and relate this not only to the performativity of a fiction film, but also to the relationship of this performativity to emotions and feelings. I shall then look at eyes: first looking at their behavioural importance, then at looking and seeing. I hope to show that we can think of eyes not merely as a part of an actor's performance, but also as a window through which we can see a world whose presence is untouchable. I aim to argue that looks and eye lines are as effective as any other cinematic tool in establishing actions, re-actions, space, time, intentions and revelations and to illustrate how I have sought to challenge certain understandings and approaches to the use of eyes to add a different perspective on a story.

I write this paper primarily from the perspective of a filmmaker, as opposed to a film scholar, and therefore while acknowledging the considerable theoretical work done by film theorists such as Vivian Sobchack (on phenomenological semiotics¹), Stephen Heath (on narrative space²), Edward Branigan (on point of view³) and Tom

¹ See Sobchack, V. C., *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton University Press, 1992.

² See Heath, S., *Question of Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 1981.

³ See Brannigan, E., *Point of View in Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*, Mouton de Gruyter, 1984.

Brown (on breaking the fourth wall⁴), not to speak of the extensive debates taking place on Catherine Grant's Film Studies for Free Blog⁵, this paper is a subjective and reflexive exploration that seeks to reveal a creative thought process in action, in contrast to a scholarly examination of the cultural theory around film language or film form. Finally, I shall very briefly summarise some of my key findings in a conclusion.

⁴ See Brown, T., *Breaking The Fourth Wall: Direct Address in Cinema*, Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

⁵Film Studies for Free: The Forth Wall:

<http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.co.uk/search?q=fourth+wall> accessed 2 February 2014.